

Session Two: Summary of Consolidated Plan Focus Group Smaller Break-out Groups

Session Two divided participants into four smaller working groups to discuss four key discussion topics derived from the first session. These four smaller working groups discussed the following topics: (1) What is the Purpose and who is the Audience of the Con Plan?; (2) How can the Con Plan be Linked with other Plans?; (3) What are the key Con Plan Data Elements? (4) How should grantees' report Goals and Accomplishments? This summary highlights the grantees' comments and suggestions on ways to streamline and improve the Consolidated Plan.

1) What is the Purpose and who is the Audience of the Con Plan?

- Participants recognized three primary audiences for the Con Plan: the public, HUD, and Congress. Information required should be geared towards these three groups.
- Participants emphasized: if HUD is not going to use the information, don't ask for it.
- Participants felt that the Con Plan in its current format is too confusing and is not useful for the general public
- HUD primarily uses the Con Plan to determine:
 - What jurisdictions are doing with HUD funds and if funds are distributed in a fair and equitable way
 - If jurisdictions are in compliance with program requirements and if HUD funds are being used effectively and appropriately
 - If grantees are accountable for their proposed goals, so HUD can evaluate progress on meeting needs
- HUD needs to justify its programs to Congress, OMB, etc. The agency is held accountable for the grantee's performance

2) How can the Con Plan be linked with other Plans?

- The Consolidated Plan is not consistent with and on the same schedule as other required plans, such as:
 - Homeless Continuum of Care Plan
 - Public Housing Plans
 - Lead-Based Paint Hazard document
 - Analysis of Impediments
 - State of California-required Housing Element
 - Other local planning and reporting documents
- HUD should devise ways to more easily reference and utilize data from already existing reports
- It would be easier to reference other planning documents, rather than re-write sections of other planning documents in the Consolidated Plan. Perhaps,

grantees could provide a list of all other planning documents and provide information on how they can be obtained.

- HUD may want to change the Con Plan to be more like the Public Housing Plan, which is very concise.
- The Action Plan could be primarily an Excel spreadsheet of projects and a budget with very little narrative.
- The CAPER should report on what the grantee did and what is left to do
- HUD should eliminate or more clearly define Certificate of Consistency

3) What are the Key Con Plan Data Elements?

- Key Information that should be included in the Con Plan:
 - Brief description of the Community and institutional structure
 - Needs and Priorities
 - Strategic Plan with Guiding Principles and Objectives
 - Role of HUD resources in the community (HOME, CDBG, ESG and HOPWA). A simple statement on what the HUD resources will be used for
 - Citizen Participation
 - Action Plan with a list of activities, resource allocation plan, numeric goals for each allocation, and a budget
 - Monitoring
 - Certifications
- Anti-poverty should be eliminated. A more appropriate question: “is the grantee serving the lowest income people?”
- Grantees should not report on housing and community development generally, they should focus more on how HUD funds are being spent
- Information should be provided on strategic goals (established locally and through citizen participation) in the Con Plan and accomplishments (including who benefited from HUD funds) in the CAPER.
- A template or form (with boxes that can be checked off “Yes” or “No” for certain questions) should be created to make the process of writing the Con Plan easier.

4) How should grantees’ report Goals and Accomplishments?

- Participants want to emphasize product over planning and production over process
- The group grappled with providing quantitative vs. qualitative data and micro-level and macro-level data.
- Participants want to steer away from benchmarking because of:
 - The difficulty of predicting upfront numeric goals for all the different categories of housing and community development
 - The difficulty of determining how to report accomplishments in terms of persons, households, units, beds, etc.
 - The difficulty of eliminating double counting of units, persons served, etc. when reporting accomplishments

- The difficulty of analyzing non-comparable data (again, it is like comparing “apples” to “oranges”)
- The difficulty of knowing when to report housing development accomplishments. Housing development is a multi-year process and a grantee never can predict when construction will be complete, when the units will be occupied, etc.
- Although most grantees find benchmarking difficult, most participants were not opposed to developing simple and sound methods of reporting goals and accomplishments. Reporting goals and accomplishments should not require additional data collection, but instead a more clearly defined, meaningful method to report data already collected.
- Participants did agree that grantees should report on the distribution of HUD funds and that grantees should identify and document who benefits from HUD funds (including extremely low, very low, low and moderate income persons)
- In the CAPER, grantees should describe if they accomplished what they stated they were going to do in the Con Plan and Action Plan.
- Most grantees want to report on funds leveraged for housing and development projects in the CAPER (not the Con Plan or Action Plan). However, when reporting on accomplishments with HUD funds and other sources of funding, there is the tendency to overstate accomplishments.
- Either eliminate or provide additional guidance on reporting non-housing accomplishments (i.e. households, persons, units, square footage for public services and facilities). Participants suggested eliminating determining non-housing needs because the total numbers and estimated dollar amounts are unrealistic and not useful.